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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups

International Year of Older Persons, 1999

Report of the Secretary-General

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–4	2
II.	Views regarding the updating of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the convening of a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002	5–7	2
III.	Adjusting international policy response to new imperatives of individual and population ageing	8–23	3
IV.	Review and appraisal exercise of the International Plan of Action on Ageing	24–26	5
V.	Conclusions and recommendations	27–30	6

* E/CN.5/2000/1.

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I. Introduction

1. In accordance with previous decisions of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission for Social Development, the Commission will consider, under item 3 (b) of the agenda of its thirty-eighth session, review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups.

2. The Commission for Social Development, in its decision 36/101, requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its thirty-seventh session a report on further possible options for substantially improving the reliability, validity and practicability of the current review and appraisal exercise with regard to the International Plan of Action on Ageing, focusing in particular on priorities identified in ongoing preparatory discussions for the International Year of Older Persons (1999). At its thirty-seventh session, in its resolution 37/2, the Commission, *inter alia*, acknowledged with appreciation the note by the Secretary-General (E/CN.5/1999/8) on the International Year of Older Persons and follow-up arrangements; requested the United Nations Secretariat to incorporate, as feasible, the experiences, policies and best practices reported by States into a long-term strategy on ageing, encompassing periodic reviews, for the consideration of the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session in the year 2001; suggested that the Secretariat further explore the feasibility of an ageing-related development index to be included in the *Human Development Report*; and requested the Secretary-General to solicit the views of States, non-governmental organizations and the private sector on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing and on the desirability and feasibility of convening in the year 2002 a review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, including the interrelationship of ageing and development.

3. Subsequently, the General Assembly, at its fifty-fourth session, adopted resolution 54/24, by which, *inter alia*, it decided to entrust the Commission for Social Development with the revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the elaboration of a long-term strategy on ageing; requested the Secretary-General to consult Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations in the preparation of a draft revised Plan of Action, including proposals on a review mechanism, to be submitted to the Commission for Social Development in 2001; and, requested the Commission for Social Development, at its thirty-eighth session, to adopt a recommendation on the desirability and feasibility of convening a second World Assembly on Ageing in the year 2002, devoted to reviewing the outcome of the First World Assembly on Ageing and to considering a long-tem strategy on ageing in the context of a society for all ages, and to report to the General Assembly on the issue during its fifty-fourth session.

4. The present report summarizes the responses received from States, organizations of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector on the aforementioned feasibility and desirability of convening a second World Assembly on Ageing and the development of a long-term strategy on ageing. The report also discusses possible options for the review and appraisal of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and a possible chronology of events leading up to the proposed follow-up to the World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, for the consideration of the Commission.

II. Views regarding the updating of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the convening of a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002

5. In accordance with resolution 37/2 of the Commission for Social Development, a note verbale dated 23 July 1999 was sent to Member States, requesting their views on updating the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the desirability and feasibility of convening in 2002 a review of the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing, including the interrelationship of ageing and development. At the time of writing, replies to the note verbale had been received from Cyprus, the Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, the Czech Republic, Mauritius, Portugal, Qatar, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, statements made by Member States during the plenary meetings of the General Assembly for the International Year of Older Persons (4-5 October 1999) made reference to this issue.[1] Moreover, 83 countries co-sponsored General Assembly resolution 54/24.

6. Among Member States that expressed a view on the subject in writing or in oral statements in plenary, there was broad support for the idea of holding a conference in 2002 to review the outcome of the World Assembly on Ageing. However, there was a range of responses regarding what the precise objectives of that conference should be. Cyprus, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Russian Federation, Spain, and Ukraine were of the view that the Plan should be "revised" or "updated". Finland expressed the view that, whereas concrete plans of action could be prepared at the national and regional levels, the United Nations could focus on formulating general normative principles and that the issue of mainstreaming ageing within the context of current global agendas should be fully discussed. During the General Assembly plenary of 4 and 5 October 1999, the European Union, referring to the need to revise the Plan of Action to make it correspond to the needs of today, noted that the need could be addressed by developing a new long-term strategy on ageing; the holding of a global meeting in 2002 to review the outcome of the first World Assembly would contribute to the formulation of a new strategy. Other Member States that spoke in support of the idea of reviewing progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action were Argentina, Australia, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Mauritius, Portugal, and the Republic of Korea. Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Japan voiced support for the development of the long-term strategy on ageing, without specific reference to the convening of a second World Assembly on Ageing.

7. The views of concerned non-governmental organizations were sought during October 1999. Replies were received from AARP, Age Concern, Eurolink Age, Fédération internationale des associations de personnes agées, HelpAge International, and International Federation on Ageing. All were in agreement with the convening of a second World Assembly on Ageing. However, the International Federation on Ageing expressed the opinion that holding the second Assembly in 2002 did not allow sufficient lead-time for adequate preparations. With regard to United Nations bodies, replies were received from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (HABITAT), the United Nations Development Programme, and otherworld Health Organization, all of which were supportive of the convening of a second World Assembly. The Secretariat is consulting with various parts of the private sector to gauge their interest on the issue.

III. Adjusting international policy response to new imperatives of individual and population ageing

8. The International Year of Older Persons concluded with significant advances in the understanding of issues of global ageing, brought about by a great deal of international exposure and the interest that followed. The Year enriched the dialogue, raised awareness, energized debate and substantive exploration, and generated a vast array of initiatives, as noted in the recent report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (A/54/268). Many were reviewed at the plenary meetings on 4 and 5 October 1999. One significant outcome of the Year was the proposal to convene in 2002 the second World Assembly on Ageing (General Assembly resolution 54/24). The General Assembly has also identified two principal tasks for the process leading towards the 2002 World Assembly: development of a long-term strategy on ageing; and revision of the International Plan of Action on Ageing.

9. A proposal for the development of a long-term strategy on ageing was first made in the report of the Secretary-General on the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing (E/CN.5/1997/4). The idea was further developed in the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons (A/52/328) and more recently in the reports of the Secretary-General on the preparations for the International Year of Older Persons (A/53/294) and on the activities and legacies of the year (A/54/268) and in the note of the Secretary-General on the International Year and follow-up arrangements (E/CN.5/1999/8).

10. A future long-term strategy would provide a broad and comprehensive statement of policy approaches to individual and population ageing, addressing the challenge of ageing in countries at different stages of demographic transition and of economic and social development. It could be based on insights gained from an exploration of the theme of the International Year of Older Persons — a society for all ages — with its four dimensions: the situation of older persons; lifelong individual development;

multigenerational relationships; and the interplay between population ageing and development.

11. While the long-term strategy would be a general policy statement on ageing in the twenty-first century, a revised International Plan of Action on Ageing would translate general policy into concrete recommendations for action. Both the future long-term strategy and a revised/updated/adjusted Plan of Action would retain the situation of older persons as their primary focus but would add new practical recommendations derived from the four dimensions of a society for all ages.

12. The International Plan of Action on Ageing was the first international consensus document on ageing, with recommendations in the areas of research, data collection and analysis, and training, and in the sectoral areas of health and nutrition, protection of consumers, housing and environment, family, social welfare, income security and employment, and education. The Plan of Action also served as the basis for further elaboration of international instruments, such as the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (resolution 46/91, annex), the global targets on ageing for 2001 (A/47/339, sect. III) and, most recently, the conceptual framework for the International Year of Older Persons (A/50/114).

13. The Plan of Action is a well-developed and clearly written document that reflects, however, the conditions of its time. New socio-economic and political realities, as well as new categories of countries which have emerged since the Plan's adoption, require elaboration of new recommendations for policy action in a number of areas. These include active ageing, care, rights and responsibilities of older persons, and the role of media in projecting an image of ageing.

14. While the Plan of Action makes several references to life-long individual development, specific recommendations that stress the importance of policies to support individual development throughout the life course into old age are needed. Another area requiring re-examination is the relationship between older persons and the family and community and the roles of family and community in sustaining multigenerational cohesion.

15. The macro-societal dimension, which addresses the relationship of population ageing and development, has also to be explored in greater depth, and concrete recommendations must be developed to guide policy, particularly in developing countries. Among the key issues are the implications for societies of demographic ageing, including the issue of sustainability of social security systems, and the social, cultural, political and other implications of the demographic revolution. For example, how will population ageing affect systems of education, employment, health care, investment, consumption and savings patterns, and housing? The population and development issue needs further analysis and would be a main component of any future strategy. In addition, the all-encompassing issue of gender and ageing likewise should be given major attention and mainstreamed into future policies.

16. Although Governments remain the major actors in the development and implementation of social policy, multisectoral partnerships of international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector are also needed to meet the challenge of ageing. Here again a new strategic vision and practical recommendations have to be in place to assist policy makers and practitioners, particularly in developing countries.

17. Clearly, the Plan can benefit from adjustment, either by updating the existing text or by more extensive revision. The Commission for Social Development, in resolution 37/2, first requested an "updating" of the Plan of Action. In resolution 54/24 the General Assembly referred to "revising" the Plan. Revision would, of necessity, require an extensive intergovernmental negotiating process, with the participation of other major actors. On the other hand, updating the Plan would appear to be a more pragmatic approach, given the anticipated timeframe and currently available resources, and would allow for formulating additional recommendations for selected areas not well developed in the current Plan, as mentioned above.

18. Several important initiatives currently under way would support the development of the long-term strategy on ageing and provide foundation for the future revision/updating of the Plan of Action. They include the Research Agenda on Ageing for the twenty-first century, the development of a policy framework for a society for all ages, and an international project on rural ageing. In addition, the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) have recently undertaken major initiatives in the field of ageing.

19. The Research Agenda on Ageing for the twenty-first century was initiated in February 1999 with an expert group meeting held in Vienna. The objective of the project is to develop a worldwide research agenda on ageing to serve as a background for policy responses to population and individual ageing, with particular emphasis on developing countries. The first expert group meeting identified general priority areas for research, substantive research priorities and key methodological issues to be resolved. A second meeting, sponsored by the Government of Germany, was held from 1 to 12 November 1999 in New York. The research areas previously identified were further developed, a final list of priorities established and tentative partnerships explored. The final step in the process will be the identification of and communication with research partners. The exercise will be completed during 2000 and will directly contribute to the elaboration of the long-term strategy on ageing.

20. The draft policy framework for a society for all ages, which was consolidated at an expert consultation held in the Republic of Korea in June 1999, annexed to the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly (A/54/268), provides a holistic perspective that will be useful in future tasks.

21. The International Project on Rural Ageing, which is headed by the West Virginia University Center on Aging in the United States of America, has spent the past few years working towards convening an international conference in 2000. The objective is to discuss the situation of older persons in rural areas and its implications for policy development. The project has benefited from the conceptual framework for the International Year of Older Persons and other United Nations inputs. A major output of the conference will be an international plan of action on rural ageing.

22. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) convened a conference in December 1999 entitled Status of the Older Population: Prelude to the Twenty-First Century, with the following objectives: to review the conditions of life of older persons in the past decade and identify the challenges for the future; to highlight findings from an ECE project to collect, disseminate and analyse microdata samples from the 1990 round of censuses in Europe and North America; and to prepare an agenda of needed research in the field of ageing for the next century. ESCAP has undertaken a number of projects over the course of the past few years, one of the most significant of which has been the production and adoption of the Macau Declaration and Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific.

23. In developing the revised or updated Plan of Action, it would be necessary to consult widely (i.e., Member States, national focal points, organizations of the United Nations system, concerned civil society organizations and the private sector).

IV. Review and appraisal exercise

24. As noted in paragraph 2 above, at its past two sessions, the Commission for Social Development has considered the issue of the effectiveness of the review and appraisal exercise of the International Plan of Action on Ageing, mandated by the General Assembly to take place every four years, and, at the request of Member States, the Secretary-General has made suggestions on how to improve the exercise. To date, no decision has been taken by the Commission to amend the procedure. The next review and appraisal of the Plan of Action is due to be submitted to the Commission in 2001. Work will therefore have to start on it in early 2000. At the same time, the global targets on Ageing for 2001 will be discussed.

25. The last two reports of the Secretary-General to the Commission (E/CN.5/1998/3 and E/CN.5/1999/8) have suggested to Member States that priority areas from the long-term strategy could form the basis of periodic assessments via, for example, brief, focused questionnaires. Issues could then be expanded upon in the mandated publication *World Ageing Situation* every five years — thus combining the two activities. In addition, the project to establish a database on public policies on ageing has now been set in action, with the assistance of the Government of the Netherlands. A database, accessible by the Internet, is being prepared, and questionnaires have been sent to all governmental focal points on ageing, organizations of the United Nations system working in ageing, and key non-governmental organizations, requesting policy input. This database is expected to assist Member States through the exchange of information and experiences regarding policies and programmes on ageing; it was also conceived of as assisting in the monitoring process of the Plan of Action.

26. In resolution 37/2 the Commission reiterated its request to the Secretariat to explore further the

feasibility of an ageing-related development index. On the basis of an initial exploration, it is felt that several conceptual and technical difficulties would have to be overcome before practical work on such an index could be initiated. The Secretariat is exploring the possibility of convening technical consultations, subject to the availability of resources.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

27. There was broad support and interest among those countries expressing a view on convening a second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002. A variety of opinions were expressed regarding the revision, updating or adjusting of the International Plan of Action on Ageing. The adjustment of the Plan of Action and the elaboration of a long-term strategy on ageing, referred to in General Assembly resolution 54/24, could be seen as two interrelated processes, which could be undertaken consecutively or concurrently. Initial draft texts would need to be submitted for the consideration of the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-ninth session, with a view to their being finalized by 2002.

28. In line with General Assembly resolution 54/24, co-sponsored by 83 countries, the Commission, at its thirty-eighth session, will need to take a decision regarding the convening of a second World Assembly in 2002.

29. In order to begin the process of preparation, the Commission may wish to hold an initial exchange of views at its thirty-eighth session on:

(a) The scope of the agenda for a second World Assembly and the possible options for the revision, updating or adjustment of the 1982 International Plan of Action on Ageing;

(b) Substantive preparation;

(c) The role of the Consultative Group for the International Year of Older Persons in the preparatory process;

(d) Participation, supporting activities and events, and other organizational and resource issues.

30. The Commission will also need to take a decision on the postponement of the fifth review and appraisal of the Plan of Action, mandated to take place in 2001, and on a review of the global targets on ageing, should it be decided by the Commission to go ahead with the revision of the Plan of Action.

Notes

[1] European Union on behalf of its 15 member States and Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus, Malta, Liechtenstein; Argentina, Australia, Benin, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Republic of Korea, Ukraine.